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ABSTRACT

An attempt has been made in this paper to show that the pushout is a complex person, that he has a kaleidoscopic personality, presenting no one image to his peers, his parents, his teachers or his prospective employer. He means many things to many people. If we are dedicated to helping all students succeed optimally, it behooves us to understand the characteristics of the pushout. This necessitates that we see him through his own eyes: (1) he has a poor self-image; (2) he sees himself as a failure. In order to help him to acquire a better self-image, answers must be found to several questions: (1) how can we avoid alienating these students? (2) what makes an educated person? and (3) how can we enhance the self-concept of academic ability of the pushout? The challenge to educators is to create a new image of the pushout, an image which hopefully results in a self-concept of adequacy. (KJ)

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THE PUSHOUT--A KALEIDOSCOPIC PERSONALITY*

The kaleidoscope is a marvelous and wonderful instrument to the viewer. Its inner mechanism is composed of loose fragments of colored glass and two plane mirrors so arranged that the viewer, by turning the device, can see an endless variety of symmetrical varicolored forms, patterns, images, or scenes.

The dropout, being defined as any student who leaves school for reasons other than death, graduation or transfer, is an enigma much in the same manner as the images of the kaleidoscope for he presents no one face or personality to the viewer or observer.

Who among us, as we have studied the dropout, has not heard such phrases as "the voluntary dropout," "the involuntary dropout," "the fallout," or "the pushout"? As Wrenn stated, there are many varieties of dropouts(13) and each one terminates school for reasons which are peculiarly his own.

A special breed of dropout, which only recently has had more than unusual interest exhibited in him, is the "pushout." It is with this variety of dropout that we are concerned with today.

The pushout is but one image or personality of the complex person known as the dropout. He too, however, exhibits many images or a changing personality. These images or personalities result, as in the case of the kaleidoscope, as they are viewed or manipulated by the pushout himself, his parents, his teachers, and his prospective employer.

In this paper three images or pictures of the pushout are presented. They are: (1) The Pushout--His Feelings of Adequacy; (2) The Pushout--School Staff Perceptions; and (3) The Pushout--His Home Environment. A fourth picture, The Pushout and The Employer, is being presented in a separate paper.

Preliminary to examining the personality that is the pushout, we must seek to rid ourselves of bias, misconception, and half-truths. Our vision should be clear and undistorted. We must first recognize the pushout as a "being," an individual who has feelings, hopes, ambitions, abilities, aptitudes, and interests. He is not a stereotyped person who may be the butt of jokes and ridicule, but a live, searching, questing, seeking, striving individual--an individual who seeks to know himself and to adjust to his environment.

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We should also view the pushout as a whole and not a fragmented personality. Many pieces of glass comprise the kaleidoscope, and when aligned properly, they bring beauty and color to the viewer. In a like manner, we should seek to know and understand the pushout as a whole person, picturing him as an entity and not fragmented into those parts of his personality which may seem offensive or objectionable to us.

When we speak of the kaleidoscopic personality of the pushout, we are saying it is largely determined by the home environment, by how the pushout perceives himself, and by how the school perceives and treats him. For our first picture of the kaleidoscopic personality of the pushout, let us examine how his feeling of adequacy is affected by the school environment.

PICTURE I: THE PUSHOUT--HIS FEELINGS OF ADEQUACY

Arthur W. Coombs[6] has claimed that one's behavior is determined by his feeling of adequacy. He has described two general categories of persons; the first, the adequate person who sees himself as liked, wanted, acceptable, able and a person of dignity, integrity and worth; and the second, the inadequate person who sees himself as unworthy, unimportant, and unable. The adequate person, feeling positive about himself, will behave in a manner which will bring about success; however, an inadequate person, feeling negative about himself, will believe he cannot succeed. For this reason, he will not put forth the necessary effort to succeed.

Research has shown that one's feeling of adequacy is determined by his degree of self-ideal relationship. One's degree of self-ideal relationship is the comparison of the way that a person feels he actually is (self) with the way he feels he should be (ideal).

The second category of persons described by Coombs is typical of the pushout who, as a "fallout" of our educational system, has had his self-concept of inadequacy largely formed, molded and shaped by the school environment with its adult authority figures.

The curriculum is one facet of the school environment that affects the pushout's feeling of adequacy. As educators, we have preached long and loud about the necessity of providing for individual differences, yet we are slow to construct such programs, or if we have, they have been inadequately staffed or financed.

Flanagan[7] has made the statement that a shocking waste of ability occurs in the nation's schools because of rigid curriculums and poor counseling. He further said that a student's success is too likely to be determined by how well he fits into the curriculum when it should be a matter of how well the curriculum fits him.

How does the curriculum affect the pushout? To many pushouts, the school curriculum seems to be sterile, vapid, lacking in interest and variety, boring, unchallenging, and unsuited to his real-life purposes. It has been, in too many cases, highly rigid, narrow, inflexible, and limited. He has been exposed, but not immersed in the curriculum. His academic record reflects this state in the numerous poor or failing grades that grace his cumulative record.

This record, however, is no indication of whether or not our pushout has the ability to succeed in school. He may have the intelligence necessary to succeed, but his self-concept of academic ability may impede his academic achievement. According to one group of researchers,[3] a student's self-concept of academic ability is associated with the academic evaluation which he perceives significant others such as parents, teachers and friends hold of him. Their investigations have shown that self-concept of ability functions independently of measured intelligence in predicting school achievement.

This concept is an amplification of the self-ideal relationship mentioned earlier, wherein a student, feeling that he cannot succeed academically, having perceived this from his parents and teachers, feels inadequate and thus his achievement is curtailed or impaired. In a study by Quimby,[10] it was found that the achiever had a significantly higher self-ideal relationship than did the underachiever. The assumption was made that the achiever felt adequate as a person, and the underachiever inadequate.

The pushout, in this frame of reference, has a poor image of his ability to succeed in school, fostered, in part, by his teachers and reinforced by his parents.

Teacher and administrator relationships are another facet of the school environment that affect the pushout's feelings of adequacy. As perceived by the pushout, they seem strained. He senses that his presence is not always wanted and thus sees himself as rejected by the school staff. He feels alienated, exiled, irrelevant, unneeded and not a part of the school institution.

Failing to be wanted and accepted in the school, he becomes protective of himself and his interests, looking out

for himself more than other oriented. To maintain his self-respect, he takes action which further alienates him from the school. Deno,[9] in referring to the slow student, presents some courses of action which are applicable to our potential pushout, e.g.:

> -- if his upbringing encourages it, he becomes delinquent, looking for a quick way to prove he can master his environment.
>
> -- if he's bold enough, he flaunts authority and pretends he doesn't care about school anyway, drawing around himself a coterie of equally alienated kindred souls. If he's this type and becomes too threatening to the 'standards' of the system, he literally becomes the 'pushout.'

To the pushout, then, the school too is a kaleidoscope. A myriad of scenes or experiences loom large in his mind--some enjoyable, but most distasteful. The image of the school environment reminds him of a spider's web, for it is an environment in which he can neither adapt nor out of which it seems he can escape. His life in school seems divorced from the reality of school.

If he persists in school, he feels forced, deprived of freedom. The law says he must go to school, but for what? In the words of Arbuckle,[1] "It is...stark evidence of our somewhat contradictory nature in that we talk of 'freedom' and 'choice,' and yet we impose on tens of thousands of young people a schooling which is little better than an incarceration. In it they learn, among other things, that they are ineffective and can do little, and thereby generage a good deal of hostility for society in general, and schools in particular."

Reaping failure, which breeds despair, which fosters ambivalence toward the school, our pushout eventually departs from it under unfavorable circumstances. Upon termination, he becomes labeled, tatooed with the name "dropout."

Lacking a certificate or diploma of graduation, which fosters feelings of deprivation or discrimination, he is not entitled to a normal existence in society. The right to a well-paying job with advancement possibilities, bank credit, and civil treatment in all phases of community life is denied him since he fails to hold this parchment which symbolizes respectability, status and dignified work.[5]

For the pushout, then, the world, what it has been, what it is, and what it is to be, is a cold, hostile, and rather inhospitable place. The school, as his most immediate experiencing segment of that world, is the same, for he lives without remembrance of a school in which there was warmth, compassion, understanding and acceptance of the reality of the child.(1)

In summarizing the pushout's perception of himself cast adrift in society, the words of Chansky(5) seem appropriate:

> The (pushout) views himself a disenfranchised, second-class citizen. He is not a part of the mainstream of the local social groupings. He craves social acceptance. Moreover, he wants to 'amount to something' so that he will be treated like any other human being. Frequently, he lacks the connections which would plant him in the mainstream of the community. Had he the connections, his lack of social courtesies would prevent him from entering into the mainstream. He feels, he hopes, he accepts rejection stoically, he despairs, he hopes again, he aspires to improve himself in the face of many social barriers. Sometimes he gives up; most often he drives onward anticipating social rejection.

PICTURE II: THE PUSHOUT--SCHOOL STAFF PERCEPTIONS

Our second picture of the kaleidoscopic personality of the pushout is that picture viewed by the school staff. This view is likely to be distorted since the staff will be looking at him through its middle-class mores or values.

The likelihood is great that the pushout springs from a subculture different from the staff's subculture which holds different values and different standards of conduct. This initiates a tug-of-war, with the staff trying desperately to impose its value system on this student and he in turn resisting such efforts.

This resistance is interpreted as indifference, hostility, or outright arrogance since the staff expects the pushout to conform, but emotionally he is not equipped to do so.(11)

The pushout, as viewed then by the school staff, possesses many faces, dependent upon the experiences the staff may have had with him. To one, he may have been intractable and non-

verbal; to another, articulate and incredulous; to a third, a loner exhibiting traits of instability; to a fourth, a chronic absentee participating rarely in school activities. The patterns that may emerge in our kaleidoscope are numerous and everchanging.

Confronted with such a student, bewildered at times as to how they should cope with or curb his behavior, school administrators, teachers, and counselors often view him as a threat to their security and prowess in knowing how to handle pupils. They have become cognizant that they cannot meet his needs, for as Stripling has said,(11) "The curriculum is too narrow, the classes too crowded, and the counseling services as well as school social work services, health services, and other diagnostic, therapeutic, and remedial services are not available to assist in working effectively with this student."

In summarizing the school staff's perception of the pushout, it appears that he is a student who threatens their sense of adequacy as professional people since they have neither the time, the skills, nor the specialized services available to assist him.

In the words of Stripling,(11) who is responsible for this notion:

> This causes the staff to become hostile toward the student or to reject him in some other fashion such as ignoring him, ridiculing him, or just leaving him alone without encouragement or help. In many cases, one or more members of the staff might suggest to the potential dropout that he would be better off outside the school program. This rejection frustrates the student. It impedes his normal growth and development. It is disastrous to such development.

PICTURE III: THE PUSHOUT--HIS HOME ENVIRONMENT

The pushout's self-concept of inadequacy is not formed in isolation. It is developed through interpersonal relations with significant others--parents, teachers and peers. We have already examined how the school environment with its adult authority figures affects the pushout's self-concept of academic ability. It is imperative, if we are to fully enter into the world of the pushout, that we view in our kaleidoscope the home environment. This brings us to our final picture of the kaleidoscopic personality of the pushout--The

Pushout--His Home Environment.

The home is the major institution in the life of the child. It is here that his primary needs of food, clothing and shelter are generally provided. Such secondary needs as love, belongingness, security, etc., may also be met in varying degrees.

Parents, being the dominant figures in the life of a child with the power to grant or to deny the fulfillment of many of these primary or secondary needs, exert a powerful and profound effect upon the pushout's self-concept of adequacy. The degree to which they have accepted the pushout, how indulgent they were to his whims, and the pattern of authority exercised in the home all contribute to the molding of the pushout's personality.

Studies have verified the impact of the home upon the personality of the child. According to one study,(4) the family is the major environmental factor affecting the character and personality of the child. Another study(2) found that the relationship between exercised control and affection experienced by the male child from his parents seems to significantly influence his entire perspective on life.

The home, then, can be considered a significant determinant of the success or failure of a child in school. Cushing (8) hypothesized that parental love and control, peer-parent identification, and direction of aggression are significant contributors to the eventual success or failure of a student. In his study of ninth grade boys classified as "acquit" (conforming) achievers and "acting-out underachievers," he found that loving and controlling parents were an important factor of school achievement, suggesting that the former students were more likely to identify with their parents and to accept responsibility for their behavior than were the latter students.

The upshot of these studies is that the pushout's acceptance of himself as an individual of worth who can succeed and adjust is determined, in a large measure, by parental relations, be they acceptance or rejection of parental affection, control and indulgence.

The pushout's self-concept of academic ability is also shaped by the values his parents hold toward education. These values are rooted in such factors as the economic level of the family, the level of parental education, and the father's occupation, all measures of socio-economic status.

Socio-economic status has been frequently used to measure the student's level of educational aspiration. Relating it to the pushout, the likelihood is great, based upon the findings of a recent study[12] on school leaving, that his parents have an average or below average income, were school leavers themselves, and that the father was employed in an unskilled, semi-skilled or skilled occupation.

Encouragement toward having the pushout remain in school would not be as intense in these homes. In the same study[12] it was found that almost half of the school leavers perceived their parents as being passively, moderately or definitely in favor of their dropping out of school.[12]

To bring our picture of the home environment's effect upon the pushout's self-concept of adequacy more sharply into focus, a brief summation of how his parents perceive him will be drawn.

The pushout's parents have feelings of ambivalence which color their true perception of him. Created in their image, he does not reflect their image of him. Their image of a well adjusted, succeeding child has faded into the reality image of a youth who is troubled, perplexed and anxious. Though he is their offspring, they disclaim responsibility for his failure to succeed.

School has become a dividing issue with bickering and argumentation evolving out of the pushout's chronic absenteeism, poor grades, strained teacher relations and general disinterest in school. These periods of stress reach their cresendo at report card time more than ever for the pushout has nothing commendable to show them. Seeking to discharge their familial obligations, they offer him a chance to own his own car or to receive cash awards if only his grades will improve. These efforts prove futile, causing further discord.

Reconciling themselves that he cannot succeed in school, for his teachers have so inferred, they develop an apathetic attitude toward school, and when the time approaches that the pushout terminates school, they are tired of the haggling and passively accept the inevitable.

SUMMARY

An attempt has been made in this paper to show that the pushout is a complex person, that he has a kaleidoscopic personality, presenting no one image to his peers, his parents, his teachers or his prospective employer. He means many things to many people. All to often he is maligned, abused and misunderstood, yet he too is a being, pulsating with life and with a personality that is dynamic, everchanging and resilient. He is striving to express himself, to find his niche in society. It remains for us as educators to answer the question, "Will we let him?" If we are dedicated to helping all students succeed optimally, it behooves us to understand the characteristics of the pushout. This necessitates that we see him through his own eyes or better yet enter into his own world.

As we have found, the pushout has a poor self-image. He doesn't like himself and sees himself a failure. Our task, therefore, becomes one of helping him acquire a better self-image. We need to help him like himself and to see himself as a person of worth. In doing so, we must strive to find answers to such questions as:

How can we avoid alienating these students?

Is it the school's function to salvage all these students? Should some have the right to an existence of their own or do they all have to be cast from a common mold?

What makes an educated person--the diploma?

Are we really committed to the concept of knowing the needs of students and individualizing instruction?

How can we enhance the self-concept of academic ability of the pushout?

Every teacher, counselor, administrator and parent who assists the potential pushout in acquiring a better self-concept of adequacy is like the turn of the kaleidoscope. They help to create a new image of the pushout, an image which hopefully results in a self-concept of adequacy. This is our challenge as educators. May we be equal to it.

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